

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
April 20, 2004

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Government Reform Committee to Review Federal Agencies' Continuity of Operations Planning *GAO: No Agency Fully Prepared to Continue Operating After Catastrophe*

Hearing Same Day as House Considers Congressional Continuity Legislation

**What: Government Reform Committee oversight hearing:
"Can Federal Agencies Function in the Wake of a Disaster? A Status Report on
Federal Agencies' Continuity of Operations Plans"**

When: APRIL 22, 2004, 10:00 A.M.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

The Committee will hold an oversight hearing to review a General Accounting Office (GAO) report that found no major federal agency or department has a complete Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan. The report paints a disturbing picture of a federal government that may not be able to remain fully functional in the event of a severe natural disaster, terrorist attack or other emergency.

The Thursday hearing coincides with House consideration of legislation aimed at ensuring Congressional continuity in the wake of a catastrophe. "As we debate legislation to cement the process for legislative continuity after a devastating attack or disaster, we need to make sure agencies – where, after all, the real, tangible, day-to-day work of the government occurs – have viable COOP plans in place as well," Chairman Tom Davis said. "At this point, it doesn't appear they do."

Under Presidential Decision Directive 67, issued in October 1998, federal agencies are required to have plans to ensure the continuity of services in emergency situations. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is designated as the

agency responsible for issuing guidance and reviewing agencies' plans. In July 1999, FEMA issued Federal Preparedness Circular (FPC) 65, which contains criteria for agencies to develop their plans and designates timelines for submission of agency plans.

Twenty of the 23 largest civilian departments and agencies surveyed by the GAO had developed and documented *some* elements of a COOP plan. But the report found that "none of the agencies provided documentation sufficient to show that they were following all the guidance" of Federal Preparedness Circular 65. In other words, agencies are still not fully prepared for the worst. GAO attributes this unpreparedness to FEMA's limited guidance and oversight of agency COOP planning.

At a minimum, COOP plans should identify: the agency's essential functions, plans and procedures for carrying out those functions, order of succession to fill key positions in an emergency, delegations of authority (including legal basis for officials to make decisions in emergencies), alternate facilities to support operations, redundant emergency communications, and vital records. In addition, tests, training and exercises should occur regularly. GAO recommends that the Secretary of DHS direct the Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response to ensure that agencies develop COOP plans by May 1, 2004 and correct problems in individual COOP plans.

The vast majority of the Federal government is still unprepared for a natural or man-made disaster, and the Committee wants to find out why and what can be done about it. The Committee will determine how FEMA's oversight is failing to produce prepared and completed COOP plans by agencies; what steps FEMA plans to take to ensure greater agency compliance; and FEMA's assessment of Federal Preparedness Circular 65 and steps it is taking to overcome any deficiencies. The Committee will also hear from GAO about its evaluation of COOP planning and its recommendations for improvement.

Witnesses:

Ms. Linda D. Koontz, Director, Information Management Issues
General Accounting Office

The Honorable Michael Brown, Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and
Response Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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